

# Air ambulances provided critical rural services

By Sue Stafford  
Correspondent

For people who live in rural areas like Central Oregon, the availability of an emergency air ambulance service can make the difference between complete recovery or living with permanent disabilities, sometimes between life or death.

In Sisters Country, we are fortunate to have two excellent services based here. AirLink Critical Care Transport offers the services of both a twin-engine Eurocopter EC-135 helicopter, based at St. Charles Medical Center in Bend; and a fixed-wing, single-engine turbo-prop Pilatus-12 based at the Bend Municipal airport, with an ambulance for transport to St. Charles.

Life Flight Network, which is based at Roberts Field in Redmond, flies a Koala A-119 Agusta helicopter. Their fixed-wing, also a Pilatus-12, is based in Aurora, Oregon where their headquarters are located.

Life Flight offers air transport across the Pacific Northwest and Intermountain West, and services are also available from their reciprocal partners

located in those areas.

AirLink provides service to central, eastern and southern Oregon and also transports patients to Portland and other hospitals in the United States. As a member of the AirMed Care Network, an AirLink membership provides reciprocity among more than 200 helicopter and airplane base locations across 28 states.

**“We are working toward reciprocity because it’s in the best interest of the community.”**  
— Kristin Lingman

Both organizations offer reasonably priced memberships that protect a member and their family from having to pay anywhere from \$15,000-\$40,000 for a medically necessary emergency flight. At this time, for Sisters residents, it is necessary to have memberships in both programs to ensure coverage throughout the area. Because of current strict Medicare



PHOTO PROVIDED

In a rural area like Sisters Country, air ambulance service can save critical time – and lives.

rules, the two services cannot offer reciprocity to each other.

Kristin Lingman, manager of business development for AirLink, said they would like to be able to have a reciprocal arrangement with Life Flight.

“We are working toward reciprocity because it’s in the best interest of the community.”

They are trying to reach consensus on the issue.

As it is now, if you require air transport, you can specify one service or the other, but if that service has their

equipment out on another call, whoever is available first will be the one to respond. Therefore, to avoid a very costly transport if your service is unable to respond, having two memberships is a small price to pay for peace of mind.

To confuse things further, AirLink and Life Flight each offer FireMed ground memberships and FireMed ground/air combination memberships in certain communities. Currently Life Flight is partnered with the Sisters-Camp Sherman Fire District as well as

Black Butte Ranch, La Pine, and Sunriver. AirLink partners with Bend, Redmond and Crook County fire departments.

As a Sisters Country resident, if a person purchases the combined package, ground transport will be provided by the local fire department medics, and air transport is covered for Life Flight. If they are unavailable, and AirLink does the transport, the member will have to pay out-of-pocket

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